

Works Progress Administration (W. P. A.) Bridge 234
Spanning Elm Creek
Elm Creek Road (Leaday-hill Road)
Voss vicinity
Coleman county
Texas

HAER No. TX-18

HAER
TEX.
42-VOS.V,
4-

PHOTOGRAPH

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

Historic American Engineering Record
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Works Progress Administration (W. P. A.) Bridge 234

HAER No. TX-18

Location: Spanning Elm Creek, on Elm Creek Road (Leaday-Hill Road), 0.8 miles northeast of the Colorado River, Voss vicinity, Coleman County, State of Texas

UTM: 14.438833.3488758
Quad: Leaday

Date of Construction: circa 1936-1941

Builder: Works Progress Administration

Present Owner: Permanent easement was granted to the Colorado River Municipal Water District in 1986

Present Use: Vehicular and pedestrian bridge over Elm Creek, one of the tributaries of the Colorado River

Significance: The bridge was one of a series of small bridges constructed as W. P. A. projects along a road across the Red Wire Pasture on the Day-Miller Ranch. This ranch road was improved to accommodate vehicular traffic, namely school buses, at a time when the numerous schools on this adjoining ranches were being consolidated.

Historian: Gus Hamblett, Texas A&M University, October 1989

I. HISTORY

A. An Overview of Historical Context

For the general historical overview that places the property in the context of the development of cattle ranching at the confluence of the Colorado and Concho rivers, see HABS No. TX-3350.

B. The Site in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

The bridge is located on a road that cuts through the pastureland on the Day-Miller Ranch, leading from the townsite of Leaday on the west to the community of Hill about six miles to the east. The land itself was patented to the school commissioners of Fort Bend County in 1848 and sold by them to William H. Day in 1878. [1] This very large tract of Coleman County is part of an earlier Day Ranch, which comprised many thousands of acres, which stretched from Grape Creek to the north, Elm Creek to the east, and the Colorado River on the south and west. The site is on a portion of the ranch which Day fences and which became known locally as the Red Wire Pasture. This portion of the ranch passed to the Miller family in 1907 and henceforth has been known as the Day-Miller Ranch. [2] During a period from 1904 to shortly after World War I, the ranch was subdivided into tenant farms. But when the tenant system failed, the farms were reintegrated into the ranch, and a configuration of land use and property ownership was resumed, comparable to a period when William Day first began to fence the open range. The Day-Miller Ranch has remained in the ownership of Miller heirs.

For a more comprehensive history of the Day Ranch and vicinity and for biographical information on William and Mabel Day and the Miller family, see HABS No. TX-3341, Mabel Doss Day Lea House; see HABS No. TX-3362, Leaday Townsite; see HABS No. TX-3363, Day-Padgitt Ranch Tenant House, and see HAER No. TX-15, Elm Creek Silo.

C. The Depression

The Depression had its first real impact in Coleman County during the drought year of 1930. [3] Two Coleman County banks failed in 1931. That same year, some federal farm relief was appropriated through agricultural loans. Beginning in 1932, various government agencies gave Coleman allocations to pay the unemployed for labor on projects including school repairs, city street and county road improvements, city water system extensions, dam constructions, construction of canneries in Coleman and Santa Anna, school lunchrooms for the county schools, and a National Youth Administration project that included the construction of an auditorium-museum in the Texas Ranger Park at Santa Anna. Relief projects occupied many Coleman County residents for a decade, from 1932 to 1942.

The W. P. A. construction projects which most affected the vicinity of the confluence were related to the consolidation of the schools and the transport of the students along new or improved ranch roads. As part of the various relief programs, the Mozelle school district, located three miles east of Leaday, was granted funds toward the construction of a high school building, and the schools on the Day-Padgitt and Day-Miller ranches were consolidated with Mozelle in the 1936-1937 school year. [4] Children who heretofore had walked to the numerous little schools, which had dotted across the ranches, were now driven in school buses across new roads or across old ranch roads improved with a series of new bridges. In 1937, a total of one hundred miles of Coleman County farm-to-market roads were constructed or improved, including the Leaday-Hill Road, known locally as the Elm Creek

Road, which runs cross the Red Wire Pasture on the Day-Miller Ranch. [5] It was in this period that the road improvements included the construction of a series of excellent new bridges along this road, including the bridge under discussion. [6]

The progress of federally-sponsored road and bridge projects in Coleman County were sporadically recorded with photography in the period 1936-1941. An exceptionally clear photograph of one of the Elm Creek Road bridges under construction exists. [7]

For related material regarding the consolidation of the schools and for a discussion of the dynamite storage shed used during the construction of the bridges, see HABS No. TX-3353, Leaday School and HABS No. TX-3360, W. P. A. Dynamite Storage Facility; see also HAER No. TX-20, Leaday Crossing. Other Elm Creek Road bridges included in this survey are HAER No. TX-17, W. P. A. Bridge 233, and HAER No. TX-16, W. P. A. Bridge 232.

III. THE BRIDGE

A. Description

This bridge is a roughly-constructed concrete slab crossing over Elm Creek. It was no doubt a part of the contemporary W.P.A.-sponsored bridge projects on the same Elm Creek road, but is certainly not so well-designed, constructed and finished as its neighbors, notably the stone and concrete bridges Nos. 232 (HAER No. TX-16) and 233 (HAER No. TX-17). Rather, it consists of a long, approximately seventy-foot reinforced concrete slab supported for most of its span on earth fill. Its only clear span is one of approximately thirteen feet over the creek channel itself. The slab varies in width, from approximately seven inches over the creek channel to approximately three feet at other points. It is twenty-five feet wide. Its eastern abutment consists of piled limestone boulders. Its western abutment is a rough stone-and-concrete table that supports this end of the short span over the creek channel.

B. Present Condition and Future of the Site

The bridge is in excellent condition.

In 1979, the Texas Water Commission granted permission to the Colorado river Municipal Water District, an entity based in Big Spring, to construct a large dam on the Colorado River. The site chosen was a location several miles downstream from Leaday, sixteen miles below the confluence of the Colorado and Concho rivers. Early in the planning stages, a program was developed to address environmental concerns, including the impact of the proposed flood area on prehistoric and historic cultural resources. In 1980-1981, a survey of historic cultural resources was conducted by Freeman and Freeman, under contract to Espey, Huston and Associates, a firm of environmental consultants in Austin. Subsequently, a number of other studies and amplifications of previous studies have been conducted. In early 1988, an Albuquerque, New Mexico, firm of environmental scientists, Mariah Associates, Inc., began further assessment of the area of the flood plain, including various archaeological investigations and assessments. Mariah has also acted in the role of coordinator of related projects, including this project, the recording of nineteen endangered historic sites in the confluence area for the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record. The sites were selected from a list compiled under the guidance of the Texas Historical Commission.

Construction was finished on the dam in the late summer of 1989. Called the Stacy Dam and Reservoir, the project will inundate approximately 19,200 acres and the threat of inundation of the bridge is possible in the near future.

III. ENDNOTES

- [1] Reference is to Coleman county Courthouse, Deed Record, vol. B, 572 and 573; Fort Bend School Lands to William H. Day, April 9, 1878.
- [2] Ibid., vol. 64, 7-11; Willie Mabel Day Padgett to Jo Zach Miller, October 1, 1907.
- [3] For a discussion of the various Coleman county relief organizations during this period, see Glynn Mitchell's essay, "The Depression," published in Coleman County Historical Commission, vol. I, 77-80.
- [4] For a discussion of the early schools in the Leaday vicinity, see Ralph Terry's essay, "Leaday Schools," published in Coleman County Historical Commission, A History of Coleman County and Its People (San Angelo, Texas: Anchor Publishing Company, 1985), vol. I, 152.
- [5] Mitchell, 78.
- [6] A thorough search was made in all records kept at the Coleman county Courthouse for further information regarding the actual construction of the bridges, particularly in the Commissioners' Minutes and the Contracts volumes for the entire period 1936-1941, but nothing directly associated with the bridge projects were found.
- [7] Mitchell, 79. The bridge shown in the photographs is of the same general type, but with two spanning piers.

V. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored by Mariah Associates, Inc., archaeologists; recorded under the direction of Greg Kendrick, HABS regional coordinator, Denver. The project was completed during the summer of 1989 at the project field office at Houston and College Station, Texas. Project supervisor was Graham B. Luhn, A.I.A., architect; project architectural historian was Gus Hamblett, Texas A&M University; intern architects were Debbie Fernandez and Paul Neidinger; student architects were Brian Dougan, Robert Holton, Janna Johnson, Wayne Jones, and Pat Sparks, Texas A&M University; photographic processing by Laura McFarlane.